February, 2022

Fort Bend Buzz

the monthly newsletter of the Fort Bend Beekeepers Association

fostering safe, responsible, successful beekeeping

Our plan is for the February 8, 2022 meeting of the Fort Bend Beekeepers to be held at 7:00 pm both online and in person at Fort Bend County's "Bud" O'Shieles Community Center, 1330 Band Rd., Rosenberg, Texas. Of course COVID-19 hasn't gone away, so stay informed in case plans change. Visitors (and new members) are always welcome. Membership dues are now $10.00 for the calendar year. If you haven't yet paid for 2022, keep a ten dollar bill in your wallet and get your dues for 2022 paid at our February meeting. The meeting will be called to order at 7:30 after 30 minutes of social time.

Meeting in person or online

Our February meeting will again be both in person at the O'Shieles Community Center and online:

Tues., Feb. 8, 7:00 - 9:00 pm

To attend online:

login: https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85622635183?pwd=UFR1NFN6MWU1emhIYmJDNG1EK1UrUT09

Meeting ID: 856 2263 5183

Passcode: 275853

To connect by telephone (audio only), call 346 248-7799, Meeting ID: 856 2263 5183 , Passcode: 275853.

An email with clickable instructions will go out ahead of the meeting. As usual, we plan to start the meeting at 7:30 after 30 minutes of "social time".

Ask a dozen beekeepers…

Here is this month's **Q** (from one of our members) and an **A**:

Q: I want to rear a few queens for splits in a few weeks. Where do I start?

An **A:** It is far less trouble to just buy proven mated queens for your splits so that you improve the overall quality of the hives in your beeyard. The best advice is probably to place an order with a queen breeder. But if you want to raise your own queens, selecting a queen mother is the critical first step. Honey production, vigorous brood rearing and docile nature are considerations, but probably the most important measure is low varroa mite infestation. A hive that has survived for several years while meeting your other criteria may be a good choice, but sampling for varroa is advised. You should expect very low (or zero) mites in the hive from your mother queen.

The easiest way to get new queens is to allow your hive to get crowded and prepare to swarm. "Swarm cells" are usually found along the bottom of frames near the entrance. Keep a close watch on things and when the cells are capped they can be carefully removed and given to a new queenless nuc to emerge and make their mating flight(s).

Rather than collecting "swarm cells", you can make a "walkaway split", allowing the queenless colony from the split to raise their own queen. Or,. you can introduce very tiny larvae (less than one day after hatching) into a queenless "starter hive". Anxious queenless workers will quickly begin rearing new queens. You place the tiny larvae in "cell cups" in a "cell cup holder" (pictured in bee supply catalogues). The larvae can be "grafted" into the queen cups by scooping them out of their brood cell using a small spatula-like grafting tool. You need to be sure to get as much royal jelly as you can as you scoop up the tiny worm-like baby larva. Very sharp eyes (or a magnifying lens), adequate lighting and a steady hand are necessary. A damp cloth cover helps prevent the larvae from drying out as you do this delicate grafting work.

When raising queens, the "starter" (queenless) colony may begin queen rearing with quite a few larvae, but would soon focus their attention on a much smaller number, maybe as few as just two or three. For that reason, the cell cup holder is usually moved into a strong queenright "finisher" colony after about 24 hours in the starter hive. The queenright bees are anxious to raise a number of new queens for future colonies. They can mature dozens of new queens.

As an alternative to separate starter and finisher hives, you may want to read up on using a "Cloake Board". It incorporates a queen excluder, hive entrance and a removable tray. It is used to manipulate a single hive as first a "starter" and then "finisher".

As an alternative to grafting, you can use various queen rearing cage systems where you confine the queen so that she lays eggs in cell cup holders. In a day or so you may have 100 or more eggs, so you can open the cage to release the queen. In three days the eggs will hatch and workers will feed the tiny larvae. You select the best looking ones to go in your cell cup holder to be introduced to a queenless starter colony. The queen rearing cage systems relieve you of the delicate grafting work (and potential injury to the larvae) and you don't have to worry about using larvae that is too

old since you know when the queen was laying.

An adult queen will emerge 15 1/2 days after egg laying. Beware that the first queen to emerge may kill her sisters, so a day or two before emergence is expected, you must prepare an appropriate number of queenless mating nucs to receive the queen cells. The new queens will need to mate with 12 or more drones. If she survives her mating flight(s), you can expect to have new brood in a couple of weeks.

HLSR

The Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo is on schedule for a three week run: February 28 - March 20. Of course COVID-19 could always screw things up, so stay informed. Last year it was first postponed and then cancelled altogether.

The AGVENTURE exhibits in the NRG Center are open daily from 9:00 am until 9:00 pm to welcome school groups and rodeo visitors to the livestock show. It features a wide variety of exhibits, from watching baby chicks hatching to a petting zoo and pony rides. One of the most popular AGVENTURE attractions is the honey bee exhibit.

Volunteers from our four local beekeeping groups (Fort Bend, Brazoria, Harris and Houston) enjoy telling rodeo visitors all about honey bees and beekeeping. The observation hive is almost always surrounded by a crowd. The HLSR honeybees are almost symbolic for us as an ambitious start for a new year with our bees.

At our February meeting, Harrison Rogers of the Harris County Beekeepers will be working on a sign-up calendar to staff the exhibit. Members are encouraged to volunteer and lend a hand.

January Meeting Notes

Craig Rench, President, opened our January 11 meeting by welcoming members and guests. Attendance was 17 in person. The attendance via Zoom was 8.

First, Gene DeBons gave a review of the book *A Tour on the Prairies* by Washington Irving. You are probably familiar with Irving's short stories, *Rip Van Winkel* and *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow,* but he also wrote biographies and histories. In 1832, Irving accompanied a surveying group led by Henry Leavitt Ellsworth, Commissioner of Indian Affairs. *A Tour* is Irving's account of this 10-week journey into the wild frontier and Indian Territory of what is now the state of Oklahoma. His book was well received when published in 1835 and gives vivid descriptions of the landscape, animals, weather, food, and encounters with Native Americans. Many consider his book to be the basis of our conception of the "early American West."

One question beekeepers are often asked is, "What can I plant to help SAVE THE BEES!?" Danessa Yaschuk, Vice President introduced our guest speaker, Mark Morgenstern with Morning Star Prairie Plants (in Damon). Mark told us a little about Morning Star Prairie Plants and what type of beneficial plants we can plant for our native bees and pollinators.

Mark began his presentation by explaining why Texas Native Plants aren't just to be appreciated for their natural beauty. Native Plants are adapted to our weather and soil and can survive extreme conditions. Once established, natives require less effort to maintain and don't need fertilizer or chemicals. Natives provide resources for wildlife: food, shelter, and nesting materials. Native plants help to prevent erosion due to their deeper root systems. If your idea of native flowers was limited to Black-Eyed Susan, Daisies and Winecups, Mark dispelled that notion by sharing 24 native flowers and 3 native ornamental grasses with a wide range of sizes, shapes, and colors (white, yellow, blue, purple, red and pink) all of which are beneficial to pollinators .

Following the presentation, Craig made the motion to raise club dues to $10 per calendar year. The motion was seconded by Margaret Wrzesinski, among several others. The vote was conducted with votes cast by hand-raising for those in favor and for those opposed; all votes were in favor.

The door prize drawings were conducted by Craig and Lynne Jones, Sec-Treas. Due to the large number of door prizes donated, including several from Texas Bee Supply, everyone in attendance who wanted a door prize, took one home.

Craig then introduced Margaret Wrzesinski, our new Mentoring Program Coordinator. Margaret asked for anyone who is interested in being a Mentor or having a mentor, to please see her after the meeting or to get her contact information to discuss the program later.

Treasurer's Report

Our January treasury balance was $3,562.99. We've collected $100.00 in dues and $25.00 in mentoring fees since our last report. Expenses for the month totalled $145.15 ($12.99 monthly website costs, $50.00 speaker expense, $35.00 meeting room cost, $28.15 for a projector adapter and $19.01 for refreshment supplies). The resulting balance is $3,542.84 ($3,492.84 in our checking account plus $50.00 in cash to make change).

TEXAS A&M AGRILIFE EXTENSION

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